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CONTACT: Rosemary Shaul
PHONE: (916) 554-2700
FAX: (916) 554-2874

ATTORNEY GENERAL GONZALES HIGHLIGHTS DEPARTMENT EFFORTS TO COMBAT SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN SACRAMENTO

Child Exploitation Indictments and Convictions Increase for the Eastern District California

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales today joined members of the Sacramento Project Safe Childhood initiative, to highlight the ongoing efforts of federal, state and local law enforcement, as well as community leaders, in combating the sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

Attorney General Gonzales was joined in today's announcement by California Secretary for State and Consumer Services Rosario Marin, U.S. Attorney McGregor Scott for the Eastern District of California and President and General Manager of KCRA-TV Elliott Troshinsky.

"The sexual abuse and exploitation of children is one of the most horrific crimes plaguing our nation today," said Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales. "Preventing, investigating and prosecuting sexual predators who target the most vulnerable members of our society is a top priority of the Department of Justice. I'm encouraged by the efforts of the men and women of the Eastern District of California for their tireless dedication to the protection of our children."

Launched in May 2006, Project Safe Childhood is a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse. Led by the U.S. Attorneys Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as identify and rescue victims.

In the last six months, indictments in child exploitation cases prosecuted in the Eastern District of California have increased by 28 percent. Between July 1, 2006 and Dec. 31, 2006, federal prosecutors in Sacramento and Fresno indicted 51 child exploitation cases, 14 more than during the previous six month period.

Last year, the Department of Justice prosecuted 1,543 cases involving the sexual exploitation or abuse of children. Over the past two fiscal years, the Eastern District of California has indicted more people for child pornography, molestation and related crimes than any other federal district in the country. In 2006, the Eastern District of California led the nation with 71 child exploitation case indictments, including cases involving Internet crimes against children,

child pornography crimes, interstate travel for the purpose of having unlawful sex with a minor, and sex trafficking of minors.

Federal law enforcement agencies have also coordinated district-wide sweeps with local law enforcement as a part of Project Safe Childhood. The first such effort, Operation Valley Predator, was conducted in October 2006 and targeted child pornography traffickers and sex registrants throughout the 34 counties of the Eastern District of California. In all, about 80 local, state and federal law enforcement agencies participated in the operation, which involved 508 searches and 135 arrests for offenses ranging from the possession or distribution of child pornography to failing to comply with sex registration requirements.

“Federal, state and local authorities in our region share an unwavering resolve to target those who would prey on our children,” stated U.S. Attorney Scott. “No single issue has coalesced law enforcement, educators, parents and community partners more than preventing the sexual exploitation of our children.”

Since the implementation of Project Safe Childhood, three additional prosecutors have been assigned to handle Internet crimes against children cases in the Eastern District of California. Additionally, the U.S. Attorney’s office has partnered with federal, state and local law enforcement, as well as community leaders and non-government organizations, to develop prevention efforts and increase public awareness of these crimes.

As part of the Eastern District of California’s prevention efforts, KCRA-TV, Sacramento’s NBC affiliate, has partnered with the U.S. Attorney’s Office to help organize and promote community outreach forums to schools, parents and community groups. In addition to preparing news reports on a variety of topics relating to Internet crimes against children, KCRA has committed part of its Web site to the issue of Internet safety, providing links to Internet safety programs so that parents can receive more information about how to keep children safe online.

Project Safe Childhood partners for the Eastern District of California include the California District Attorney’s Association; numerous county district attorneys; the Sacramento County Sheriff and Sacramento Police Departments; County Probation Offices; the Sacramento, Nevada, and Stanislaus County Offices of Education; the FBI; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); the U.S. Postal Inspection Service; the U.S. Marshals Service; U.S. Secret Service; numerous police and sheriffs’ offices throughout the Eastern District; the California Department of Consumer Affairs’ Coalition for Children’s Internet Safety; the California Department of Justice; the California Highway Patrol; the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation; and the State Parole Office.

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